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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT MOVING FORWARD WITH WAIT TIME GUARANTEE

Project Lays Groundwork to Build on Success of Cataract Surgery Wait Time Reductions for Ontarians

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is moving forward to establish a wait time guarantee for cataract surgery within the public health care system with the launch of a project to ensure timely access for patients, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

"Our government is committed to improving access to health care for the people of Ontario," said Smitherman. "Today's announcement builds on Ontario's successful Wait Time Strategy and allows us to establish a cataract surgery wait time guarantee."

Under an agreement with the federal government, the Ontario government will start a demonstration project this summer to implement a cataract surgery wait time guarantee. This project will be aimed at patients who are at risk of waiting longer than the province's current access target of 26 weeks. During this demonstration project, these patients will be contacted and given the opportunity to receive access to cataract surgery at another public health care institution elsewhere in Ontario.

Following the completion of the demonstration project, Ontario plans to establish the cataract surgery wait time guarantee by January 1, 2009. Progress will be reviewed by 2010.

Since Ontario launched its Wait Time Strategy in 2004, the McGuinty government has invested $95 million to provide 58,300 more cataract surgeries – leading to a 41 per cent reduction in wait times.

"Our investments have driven innovation in the public health care system, which has enhanced its capacity to provide cataract surgeries," said Smitherman. "We are very proud of the great progress we have made in reducing wait times for cataracts. The innovative new ways of delivering cataract surgery are a credit to our frontline health care providers."

Examples of the innovative cataract models Ontario's Wait Time Strategy has unlocked include:

- Kensington Eye Institute: created as a not-for-profit high volume center for cataract surgery. Kensington is reducing wait times through increased efficiency and maximizing capacity;
- Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) rural cataract surgery model: This model of care provides patients with care closer to home by transferring cataract surgeries to a rural hospital. This model will be fully operational later this coming year;
- Perth/Smiths Falls District Hospital cataract surgery model in the South East LHIN: This centralized single intake high volume center is intended to increase capacity, reduce wait times, as well as improve efficiencies and patient outcomes. It will reduce the number of patients that need to travel to Kingston for surgery, increasing access to health services for patients living in this area;
- Regional Eye Medicine and Eye Surgery Centre in the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant

LHIN: This model provides patients with the option to choose the surgeon with the shortest wait time, builds and promotes best practices, and optimizes use of surgical resources in the community.

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities – keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

Ontarians can now access the wait time at hospitals throughout Ontario for five key procedures by visiting www.ontariowaittimes.com.

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